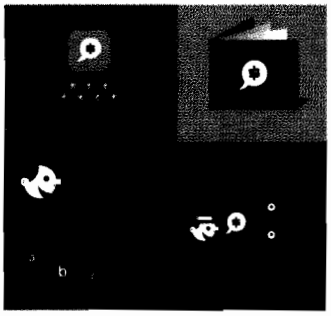
Netwatch By Jim Carroll

Your guide to business & accounting on the Internet

Authors' time has come

We know by now the Internet has the power to change business models. Nowhere is this truer than in the creative arts industry: writers are publishing their own books, musicians are producing their own CDs, and artists and craftspeople are finding a global marketplace in which to sell their work.

Many accountants I know carry a mean creative streak and have an interest in publishing a book, either for professional or personal purposes. My message to you is that this is becoming easier to do as a number of technical elements fall together. My wife, Christa, and I have taken advantage of this opportunity directly.



After writing some 34 books in the past 10 years, I had grown tired of book publishers. They often take more than a year to bring a book to market, which can render some content out of date by the time it is in print. So I self-published my last book and had it out within three months. Christa, also a CA, has been working with me for 12 years and has become quite adept with the publishing process. So when a friend was looking to publish a book she wrote in time for a charity fundraiser that was a few months away, my wife, ever the optimist, exclaimed, "We can do it!"

Therein began a fascinating voyage. We typeset the files and scanned the illustrations, did the layout, registered an ISBN for the book with the Canadian Copyright Agency, and built an e-commerce site that allows for online sales. We also had a graphic designer friend whip up a book cover. In only seven weeks, we published *The Tiniest Warrior of All*, by Nicola JD Maher.

We donated all our time to the project, given the nature of the book: Nicola gave birth to her daughter, Imogen Rose Day Maher, in February 2003 at Women's College Hospital in Toronto. She was 16 weeks premature and weighed only 685 g, or 1 lb. 8 oz. Her chances for survival were bleak. Nicola and her husband, John, were constantly by her side, but because of Toronto's SARS crisis, Imogen's young siblings were not allowed to visit. So Nicola invented a fairy tale featuring a tiny warrior princess literally fighting the battle of her life. The story provided a framework of hope and understanding for the entire family that would carry them through the next four months.

That's the story Nicola wanted to publish in time for LifeBeat, a healthcare fundraiser held annually in Toronto. We pulled it off in a flurry of activity with our chosen printer, Manitoba-based Friesens, which has a sophisticated online process that allows the author and printer to work together to whip the files into shape.

There are many other innovations that self-published authors can take advantage of. For example, a variety of innovative print-on-demand services have come to the Internet. I use BookSurge; when a customer orders my book, it is printed within 24 hours in one of five plants around the world. That helps me keep inventory low. I can also do special print runs for clients with a customized foreword, which has led to new opportunities.

Self-published authors can also get their books listed on Amazon.com through its Advantage program. Although Amazon takes a hefty royalty, the sheer volume of book-buying on the site means that if you self-publish, you simply must be listed there. Furthermore, if you are adept at creating a website, you can easily add a credit card transaction link for folks to buy your book using PayPal, a subsidiary of the global giant eBay.

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